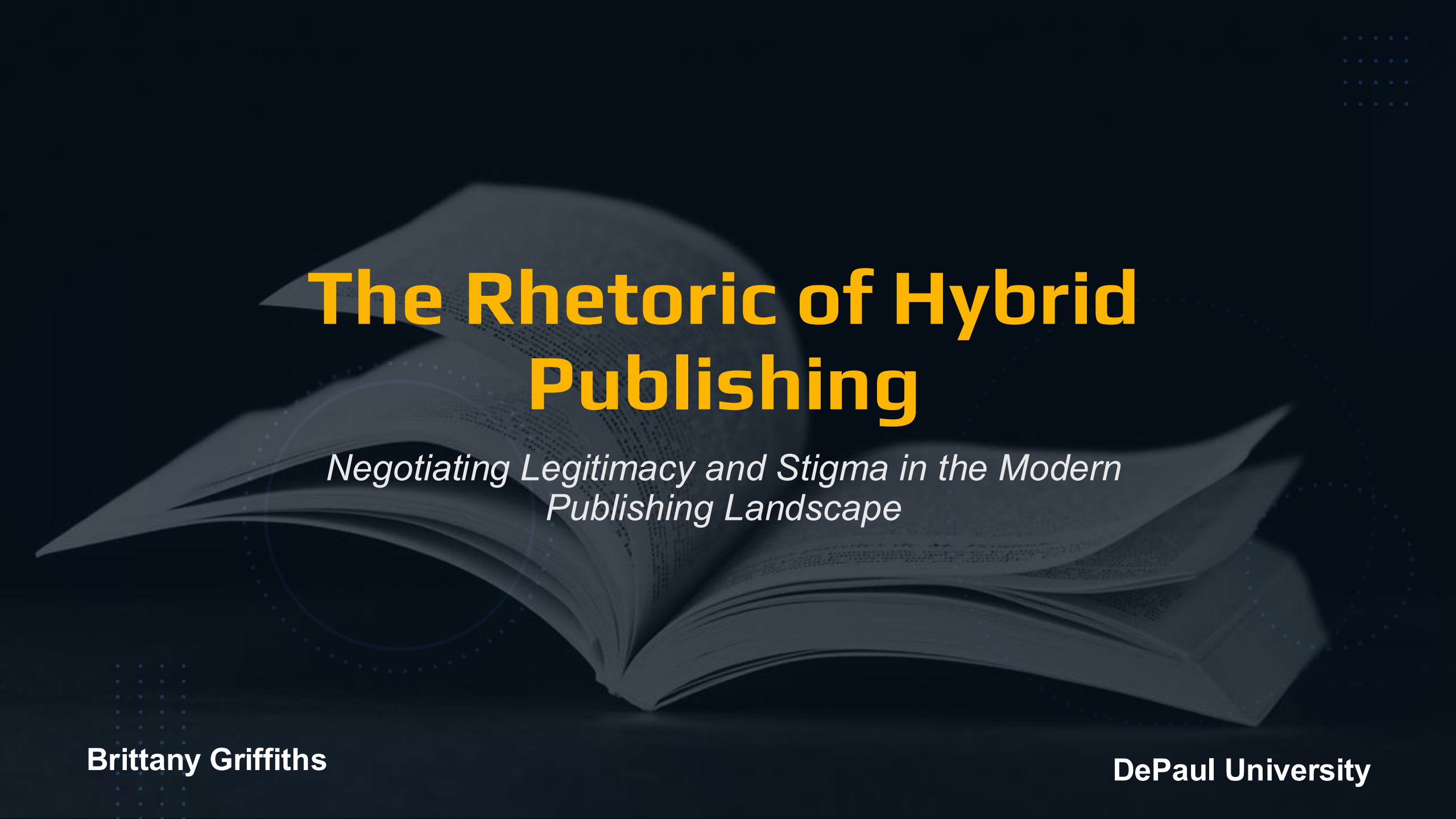




The Rhetoric of Hybrid Publishing

Negotiating Legitimacy and Stigma in the Modern Publishing Landscape

Let's begin with a simple premise . . .

**The publishing industry
is notoriously opaque.**

What Hybrid Publishing is Not

- It is not traditional publishing.
- It is not self-publishing.
- It is not a publisher of both traditional and self-published titles.
- It is not vanity publishing.
- It is not a publishing services model.
- It is not referring to the dual format of print and digital.
- It is not a short cut to being published.
- It is not free.

So, what is a Hybrid Publisher?

- Operate in the middle ground between traditional publishing and self-publishing.
- Unlike self-publishing services companies, reputable hybrid publishers vet submissions, maintain editorial integrity, abide by production standards, deliver comprehensive distribution beyond Amazon, and offer authors a higher-than-standard share of sales revenue.
- The IBPA has laid out 11 points of criteria to identify a hybrid publisher.

IBPA CRITERIA

1. Define a mission and vision for its publishing program.
2. Vet submissions.
3. Commit to truth and transparency in business practices.
4. Provide a negotiable, easy-to-understand contract for each book published.
5. Publish under its own imprint(s) and ISBNs.
6. Publish to industry standards
7. Ensure editorial, design, and production quality.
8. Pursue and manage a range of publishing rights.
9. Provide distribution services.
10. Demonstrate respectable sales.
11. Pay authors a higher-than-standard royalty.²

“Hybrid publishing has emerged as a disruptive force in today’s literary landscape, challenging traditional notions of legitimacy, authorship, and artistic authority.”

—BRITTANY GRIFFITHS, *The Rhetoric of Hybrid Publishing*¹



A CLOSER LOOK

How do we study the way people talk about ideas?

Rhetorical Analysis

Literature Review

How have industry peers historically evaluated different publishing models?

Digital Ethnography

Where do authors communicate about publishing opportunities?

Industry Interviews

What do industry leaders think about hybrid publishing?

Analysis

Why do these rhetorical considerations matter?

LITERATURE REVIEW

How have industry peers historically evaluated different publishing models?

“The book has already encountered difficult times and has always endured ... at worst, there's an attempt to treat it like an endangered species, to be corralled in a large national park.”

—ROBERTO CALASSO, *The Art of the Publisher*²

Meaning Making

- The book perceived as a rare and culturally cherished object reinforces the mystique of traditional publishing and authors' desires to have their work chosen for publication.
- Hybrid publishing shifts the capital risk from publisher to author, requiring them to invest in the production, distribution, and marketing of their work while retaining higher creative and financial control.
- Because authors in hybrid contracts are required to front capital to produce, promote, and distribute their own books, many questions arise around projected return on investment (ROI).

Why Go Hybrid?

- Creative control
- Higher royalties
- Faster time to market
- Professional credibility
- Access to distribution
- Entrepreneurial mindset
- Rights retention

“The chief advantage of the hybrid model, for those who choose it, seems to be control—over timing, rights, outcome, and the product itself. The chief barrier, for those who do not choose it, seems to be money.”

—BARBARA LINN PROBST, *Hybrid Publishing: Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know*³

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Where do authors communicate about publishing opportunities?

“Just an honest question, not trying to create conflict, I swear. I'm wondering why it is that the instant someone says they went through a hybrid publisher people become so . . . passionate against it?”

—REMOTE_DURIAN6410, *Honest Question About Hybrid Publishers*⁴

Digging into the Digital

- Digital platforms such as Reddit, Instagram, and Discord host active author communities focused on publishing discussions and information sharing.
- This study analyzed 39 Reddit posts about hybrid publishing from the past four years to identify recurring rhetorical patterns.
- It also examined the websites of 35 active hybrid publishers to identify the keywords and rhetorical strategies used in their branding.

A word cloud centered around the word "publishing". The word "publishing" is the largest and most prominent. Other words of varying sizes are scattered around it, including "risk", "shared", "author", "industry-standard", "control", "creative", "pathways", "relationship", "best", "editorial", "next-generation", "model", "distribution", "collaboration", "author-subsidized", "mentorship", "guidance", "partner", "worlds", "centric", and "alternative". The words are in shades of blue and white, set against a white background.

publishing

risk

shared

author

industry-standard

control

creative

pathways

relationship

best

editorial

next-generation

model

distribution

collaboration

author-subsidized

mentorship

guidance

partner

worlds

centric

alternative



r/writers • 1 yr. ago
Remote_Durian6410



Honest Question about Hybrid Publishers

Just an honest question, not trying to create conflict, I swear. I'm wondering why it is that the instant someone says they went through a hybrid publisher people become so... passionate against it? I absolutely think it's important for oblivious writers to understand exactly what a hybrid publisher is and does versus what a traditional publisher or self publisher does. Yes, it's super important to understand that traditional publishers do NOT ask for money to publish, and that money flows to the author. But I have one or two writer friends who have gone through hybrid pubs because they have the money, they wanted to pay someone for the service of editing, cover art, formatting, printing, etc., and are happy to share their royalties. They simply wanted to get their work out in the world and money is of no consequence to them. This is not a reason to shame them.

I fully expect this post to get downvoted to hell and back, but I just start to feel really badly for writers who understand what they are getting into, are asking for some help with something that doesn't have to do with whether they went through a hybrid publisher or not, and are getting shamed for it. PLEASE be kind in your comments. Ultimately, we're all in this together and just want to help a writer out.

Responses



Maleficent_Lab_5291 · 1y ago

What your describing friends used is called a vanity press at least it used to be. When they are upfront about what they are. They are the most ethical and honest of the hybrid model publishers, and there is nothing wrong with using one, but you will almost certainly lose money doing so.

The problem is deceptive advertizing, and straight-up lies are often used to see those services that are what people take issue with and are trying to warn others about. If you google any variations of how to publish my book, you're inundated with ads for "publishers" that range from dishonest to fully just scams. Naturally, this upsets people.

This is an aside and just based on a few personal interactions, but they often seem to target the elderly and I find that especially repulsive.



8



Award



Share



Barbarake · 1y ago

As long as your friends knew what they were getting into and are happy with what they got, no problem.

The problem is that a certain percentage of hybrid publishers charge exorbitant amounts and/or make promises that they don't deliver. These publishers prey on new authors who don't really understand how book publishing works and just want to see their books published.



16



Award



Share



Responses



flying_squirrel_521 · 1y ago

Fiction Writer

I think most people decide not to go with hybrid publishers, because there are some real ones and many many scams. Plus, if you self publish you essentially also pay for all those things. Only thing a hybrid publisher could possibly do is get a book into bookstores easier, but other than that (from what I have heard from friends who decided against hybrid publishers) they preferred self-publishing, because they would get basically the same with full royalties...

The biggest problem is that there are a lot of "hybrid publishers" who basically just scam you. They charge more for services, take a huge royalty cut, and don't actually help promote the book or anything... A legit hybrid publisher can be great... But there are so many more scammers out there than legit ones... So it is risky... I have had friends who were almost ripped off.

The risk is why I personally want to go the self-publishing route (or trad-pub if I have a book that could possibly work for trad-pub and can get into this whole business).



2



Award



Share



No-Replacement-3709 · 1y ago

I feel bad for them too because if you listen to the majority here, they are going to hell. Also, no one has a good experience so their claims are not valid by any measure. They are simply lying to you and secretly burning their hybrid published books at night. Like self-publishing isn't the height of vanity.



1



Award



Share



Responses

 **Remote_Durian6410** OP · 1y ago

I completely agree that some of these entities take advantage of people's ignorance and it's awful. And yes, "hybrid" presses are pretty much vanity presses. I just worry that some people go beyond the "warning writers of the scams" to "shaming writers who went into it with open eyes."

⊖ ↑ 3 ↓ 🏆 Award ↗ Share ...

 **extremelyhedgehog299** · 1y ago

Paying for publishing services and getting what you paid for is fine. Unfortunately, many of these companies scam people and never do the editing or formatting they're supposed to. (I have a friend who does book formatting and one of these "publishers" was always giving her books that hadn't been edited at all to format.)

⊖ ↑ 6 ↓ 🏆 Award ↗ Share ...

 **hamstervirus** · 1y ago

Some hybrid publishers are "vanity" presses. Meaning you pay and they will publish you. It's not legit.

⊖ ↑ 1 ↓ 🏆 Award ↗ Share ...

“Money *always* flows to the author.”

—YOG’S LAW⁵

Headers Tell All

- Honest Question about Hybrid Publishers
- Hybrid Publishing: Instinctively Skeptical
- Hybrid publishers? Is there a difference between this and vanity publishing?
- Vanity vs hybrid publisher?
- [PubQ] Is "Hybrid Publishing" a promising route?
- Successful Hybrid publishing?
- Is it stupid to consider hybrid publishing?
- Hybrid/vanity publishers - good or bad
- Legit, Vanity, or Hybrid Press?
- Self-publish versus Hybrid Publishing by the numbers



Industry Interviews

What do industry leaders think about hybrid publishing?

An Oral History Approach

- Conducted semi-structured interviews with authors, editors, hybrid and traditional publishers, and other industry professionals.
- Built a contact list of 200 publishing professionals using multiple strategies like leveraging my personal network, reaching out directly to industry leaders and issuing an open call via personal social media and the XOXO Publishing Instagram account.
- Interviews aimed to understand how individuals frame experiences, justify choices, and perceive content value.

39 PARTICIPANTS

5%

TRADITIONALLY
PUBLISHED
AUTHORS

5%

SELF-PUBLISHED
AUTHORS

2%

HYBRID-PUBLISHED
AUTHORS

31%

PUBLISHERS

38%

INDUSTRY
PROFESSIONALS

18%

HYBRID-PUBLISHED
AUTHORS

**Because a majority of participants held multiple roles within the publishing industry, they were assigned to the category that best reflected their lead title.*

Analysis

Why do these rhetorical considerations matter?

Key Takeaways

1. Hybrid publishing blends professional editing and distribution access, with “respectable sales” as a key marker (IBPA).
1. Online skepticism, driven by *Yog’s Law* and Reddit debates, often conflates hybrids with vanity presses due to upfront costs.
1. Ethical hybrids are transparent, collaborative, and focused on author goals and quality.

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